

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **December 10, 2002, Work session**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 6

CONSENT:

REGULAR: **X**

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

ITEM TITLE: **Skatepark**

RECOMMENDATION:

Endorse staff recommendations to proceed with plans to design and construct a skatepark in partnership with Amazement Square.

SUMMARY:

The community has consistently expressed a desire to have a skatepark in the Central Virginia area. Most have looked towards the City to take a leading role to design, build, manage and finance a skatepark. Records in Parks and Recreation show that this has been a topic of discussion since 1992. In December 1999, after benchmarking across the state, researching nationwide and meeting with stakeholders, Parks and Recreation reported to City Council on the a proposal for a skatepark. The following is a synopsis of information given to Council:

- ? The two largest obstacles blocking the construction of a park are location and the lack of capital funding.
- ? It was recognized that a park will be a regional draw.
- ? Recommended that Council fund \$50,000 towards CIP funding for the park, with the community raising the additional needed funding. The estimated capital costs for a park are \$110,000- \$200,000 depending on size and amenities. This does not include the cost of land.
- ? Recommended that the City continue to search for an appropriate location including the possibility of purchasing property. The site should be visible, not intrusive on a neighborhood or school, have the potential for lights, and have adequate parking. Ideally, the site should include restrooms and a potential for concessions. The site should be a minimum of 10,000 square feet of skating surface.
- ? The design of the park should accommodate all user groups, including skateboarders, inline skaters and bikes. Roller hockey is also growing in popularity.
- ? Recommended that Parks and Recreation manage and staff the park, charging a small entry fee. The fee and concession sales could offset a majority of the operating costs. Helmets and pads would be required and available at the concession area.

Council agreed in concept and funded \$50,000 towards a park for FY 2002. Because a site had not been identified and the community had not begun fundraising, the capital funding was subsequently moved to FY 2003.

The interest to build a skatepark continues to grow. Amazement Square has made a proposal to Parks and Recreation that staff believes meets the criteria set in 1999. City staff and representatives from Amazement Square will present the concept to City Council for input and possible endorsement. The basics of the proposal are as follows:

- ? Transfer ownership of property adjacent to the signal tower building from the City to Amazement Square.
- ? Amazement Square will finance and construct a skatepark in conjunction with renovation of the signal tower building.
- ? The City will invest \$50,000 in Capital Improvement Project funds in the design and construction of the park.
- ? City staff will be available to Amazement Square to provide technical and professional assistance in the design, construction and development of management plans for the park.
- ? Parks and Recreation will promote the skatepark as resources allow and actively program activities at the park.
- ? Amazement Square will manage the park in conjunction with the management of the signal tower building. Amazement Square will assume liability for the park.
- ? The City will retain some rights to the property. If Amazement Square, for whatever reasons, discontinues use of the property for a skatepark, then the property reverts to the ownership of the City. The City will also have easements through the property for future trail development.

City Council
Work Session
Executive Summary
December 14, 1999

Skateboard Park

Researched and prepared by: Parks and Recreation Division staff

Executive Summary
December 14, 1999
Skateboard Park

Background

The interest in developing a skateboard facility in Lynchburg is not new. In 1992 Parks and Recreation, under the direction from City Council, prepared a feasibility study on just this issue. Mr. Charles Ripley, the Parks Coordinator, researched other localities and addressed the core issues related to constructing and managing a city owned skating facility. The report did not recommend building a park at that time. Mr. Ripley did recommend that if certain factors changed that the city should reconsider. Those factors included a demonstrated need and a strong citizen interest in jointly funding the venture.

In 1997 citizens requested that City Council consider funding a skateboard park. City Council requested that Parks and Recreation work with a citizens group to determine the feasibility of a joint effort to make the park a reality. Over the past year, staff benchmarked with other localities that have built skateboard facilities, researched design criteria and developed facility management practices.

Some may believe that skateboarding is a fad and, if ignored long enough, will disappear. Surveys support that the interest in skateboarding is on the rise. What is of significance is a definite increase in BMX biking, inline skating and inline hockey. In some areas of the country these are the fastest growing sports and, in our own state, we see more facilities built every year to accommodate these needs. This summary highlights the basic issues surrounding the design and management of a skating/biking facility.

Skating Facilities

The following are considerations for design of a skate park:

- ? The site should be a minimum of 10,000sq.ft. and located in an urbanized area. The facility should not be located in a neighborhood or near a school. Ideally, the park would be located in a higher traffic area with high visibility.
- ? The design and construction cost of a skate park is \$70,000- \$300,000. The variance in cost is determined by the availability of land, the construction materials and the determined need for lighting, restrooms, fencing, landscaping and other site amenities.
- ? The design process should include opportunity for user input.
- ? The park design and management should accommodate inline skaters and bikers. The design should include a "street" component that mimics the urban environment.
- ? The park should accommodate differing levels of skating expertise with an area designated for beginner skaters.

Management Practices

There are lessons to be learned from other localities that have invested in a skating facility. The recommendations are made with quality in mind. If we are going to do this let's do it right.

- ? **Staffing:** Parks and Recreation recommends staffing the park with established operating hours. Several localities that did not initially staff the facilities have henceforth made the decision to staff. Vandalism and graffiti are common problems. Without adequate staff the burden to enforce rules often falls to the local police.
- ? **Liability:** Literature and statistics support that injury claims in a skate park are less than with other organized sports, such as football, basketball and soccer. There are two schools of thought. One is that skating is a less injurious sport. Secondly, that skaters understand that they are skating at their own risk and are less likely to turn in claims to the municipalities. Whatever the case, the city's liability can be minimized by sound routine inspections and maintenance, proper signage and enforcement of park rules. In addition, the Virginia General Assembly amended the Virginia Recreation Immunity Act to include skateboard facilities, which offers municipalities a certain amount of protection against lawsuits on public facilities.
- ? **Operating Costs/ Revenue:** A yearly budget for a staffed park is generally \$65,000-100,000. Several localities fully offset these costs by charging entry fees to the park and by operating concessions.
- ? **Marketing:** Several localities report that, when first opened, the parks are busy and heavily used, but after several months of operation there is a significant drop in use. The most successful parks, in terms of generating revenue to cover operating cost, developed marketing strategies to attract users on the local and regional level. At least one park successfully draws regional skating demonstrations and special events.

Obstacles

- ? Currently, there is no identified funding for this project. There are numerous examples of successful private/public ventures in funding skating facilities. Skate parks lend themselves to partnerships. Lynchburg citizens are struggling in the fund raising arena for several reasons. Skaters are generally young and do not have the experience or the organization to support their efforts. A supporting nonprofit is needed to give mature guidance and to provide fiscal accountability.
- ? Land has not been identified for the park. Community Planning and Development continues to work with Parks and Recreation in locating a suitable site. A necessity to purchase land will add considerably to the cost of the project.

Staff Recommendations

- ? The needs stretch beyond skateboarding. This is certainly the most visible need as skateboarders on the streets and in parking lots draw attention. Ideally, Lynchburg

can take a long view and, through phasing, develop a skating facility that will meet the needs of inline skaters, hockey players and BMX bikers.

- ? Given the current fiscal environment and the many pressing needs for recreational facilities, the skate park should be managed in such a way to generate revenue to offset some of the operating costs. A joint public/private venture is recommended to fund capital costs.
- ? There is demonstrated citizen interest in a skating/biking facility. It would be helpful to the citizens engaged in fund raising for the City to demonstrate intent.

City staff recommends proceeding with this proposal by drafting a Memorandum of Understanding and beginning the process to transfer property to Amazement Square.

PRIOR ACTION(S):

Work session, December 14, 1999

BUDGET IMPACT:

Expenditure of CIP funding of \$50,000 that is available through a FY 2003 appropriation

CONTACT(S): Kay Frazier, 847-1640, ext. 128
Andrew Reeder, 847-1640, ext. 110
Robb Simpkins, 847-1640, ext. 115

ATTACHMENT(S):

Summary Report, December 14, 1999
Photo of proposed location

REVIEWED BY: lkp